

LITHUANIANS SAY MOSCOW HAS CUT MAIN OIL PIPELINE

GROWING PRESSURE

Baltic Republic, Seeking Talks, Offers a New Gesture to Soviets

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MOSCOW, April 18 — After a confusing day of threats and denials, Lithuania reported tonight that the Soviet authorities had cut off the principal supply of oil to the republic as part of the Kremlin's campaign to force Lithuania to retreat from its declaration of independence.

The Lithuanian information office said the pipeline supply of crude oil to the Mazeikiai refinery in the northwest of the republic was cut off at 9:30 P.M. Vilnius time, five minutes after notice was telephoned to the plant in the name of Kremlin officials. On Tuesday, Lithuania said it had been warned that the supply would be halted today in keeping with an ultimatum issued by President Mikhail S. Gorbachev last Friday.

Search for a Solution

Even as the announcement came, it was clear that attempts to find a solution to the crisis were continuing. During the day in Vilnius, the Lithuanian Parliament offered a conciliatory gesture to the Kremlin by voting to refrain from enacting new laws for two weeks if Moscow agreed to begin preliminary consultations on the independence campaign.

But the Parliament also said that it "confirms its loyalty to the acts of March 11," when the Parliament declared independence and suspended the Soviet Constitution. [Text of the Parliament's resolution and letter to Mr. Gorbachev, page A10.]

There was no confirmation in Moscow tonight that the ultimatum threatening an oil cutoff had, in fact, been carried out.

Signs of Pressure

Its enactment would signal a far higher level of pressure from Mr. Gorbachev than has previously been seen in the five-week-long sovereignty crisis and would also increase the calls in other nations for retaliatory economic measures against the Soviet Union.

[In Washington, the Bush Administration said that until it could confirm reports of the cutoff it would not have any response. The reports came only a few hours after Secretary of State James A. Baker 3d told a Congressional committee that the United States would consider severing certain commercial arrangements with the Soviet Union if Mr. Gorbachev continued tightening a economic noose around Lithuania. Page A10.]

Soviet officials denied earlier today that orders for a cutoff had yet gone out. But managers at Mazeikiai, the sole refinery in Lithuania, said tonight

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that the pipeline supply from the city of Polotsk in the republic of Byelorussia in the western Soviet Union was finally stopped tonight.

"The Soviet Union, being unable to find a humane solution, is resorting to economic coercion against a neighboring country," the Lithuanian President, Vytautas Landsbergis, said after receiving the news and vowing that the pressure would only deepen the republic's commitment to independence.

There was no immediate indication of how long the reported cutoff might continue. The struggle between the Kremlin and the republic has been marked by steady psychological pressure and changing Kremlin tactics, with alternate waxing and waning of the sense of crisis.

The reported cutoff of oil itself would presumably mean no immediate industrial hardship or shortage of refined oil in the republic, because Lithuanian officials estimated earlier this week that there was a stockpile of up to four months of crude oil with which to continue operations in the event of a cutoff.

Plant officials confirmed tonight that work was continuing after the pipeline inflow fully stopped, about an hour after a decrease was first evident.

Lithuanian officials quoted plant officials on the night shift as reporting that the authorization for the stoppage was signed by the Soviet Prime Minister, Nikolai I. Ryzhkov, under a resolution of the Council of Ministers.

A 48-Hour Ultimatum

On Friday, just before the long Easter weekend, President Gorbachev issued a 48-hour ultimatum to the Landsbergis government to repeal a series of independence laws or face reductions in supplies from the rest of the Soviet Union. On Monday, the Lithuanians had responded to the ultimatum with an offer of talks on central issues mentioned in the ultimatum.

Before the cutoff, a Soviet deputy oil and gas industry minister, Aklim Mukhamedzyanov, said in a telephone interview that "allegations that these supplies have been terminated are completely groundless."

"We have received no instructions from the Council of Ministers to implement such measures," he said.

With no fuel resources of its own, Lithuania is completely dependent on the crude oil, natural gas and petroleum shipped in from the Soviet Union and panicked citizens have been lining up daily at gas stations around the republic to fill up their cars and trucks. There was no sign today of a cutoff of natural gas, which had also been threatened.

The Mazeikiai refinery processed almost 13 million tons of oil last year



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Refinery at Mazeikiai produces most of the petroleum products used in Lithuania.

About 7 million tons of that was used in Lithuania, while the remainder was sent to the other Baltic republics and elsewhere. Small amounts also are sold into northwestern Europe through Hamburg, West Germany.

Lithuania imports 97 percent of the fuel it consumes, with nearly half of the total supplied by oil produced in other Soviet republics that is used to heat and power Lithuanian factories. Factories and other industrial activities also run on coal. Homes are heated mainly by natural gas. Lithuania does produce some energy at a nuclear power station at Ignalina and in some small hydroelectric stations.

Mr. Gorbachev and Mr. Ryzhkov threatened Lithuania on Friday with a cut-off of critical supplies if the Parliament there did not revoke within 48 hours recently passed legislation, including a call to boycott the Soviet spring military call-up and the introduction of mandatory citizen identity cards.

The ultimatum from Moscow did not include a demand that the republic revoke its declaration of independence, made March 11, a move the republic has repeatedly rejected.

A Gesture to Moscow

Lithuania's Parliament, in a conciliatory gesture to the Kremlin, voted unanimously today to refrain from passing new laws for two weeks if Moscow agrees to begin preliminary consultations about the republic's drive for independence. The Parliament's resolution did not specifically mention the status of laws passed since the independence declaration, except to say the Parliament supports a statement made Monday by the Lithuanian Prime Minister, Kazimiera Prunskiene.

In that statement, the first sign that the republic was willing to compromise with Moscow, Mrs. Prunskiene sent a

telegram to the Soviet leadership saying that Lithuania would not stand in the way of Lithuanian men willing to serve in the army and would not take action against Soviet citizens choosing to stay in the republic while maintaining their Soviet citizenship. Then, Tuesday, as the specter of a fuel blockade loomed, Lithuanian legislators began urging that serious concessions be offered to Moscow in the hopes of encouraging the Kremlin to agree to negotiations.

In addition to the proposal on temporarily suspending the passage of any new laws, the Lithuanian resolution urges Moscow "to refrain from using force, including economic pressure, against Lithuania and its citizens."

It further calls on Lithuanian citizens and economic organizations "to prepare for a period of austerity and spiritual endurance."

Letter to Soviet Leaders

The Parliament also unanimously adopted a letter to Mr. Gorbachev and Mr. Ryzhkov, outlining its latest position and supporting the points raised by Mrs. Prunskiene in her telegram to the Soviet President earlier this week.

The parliamentary letter says that a Lithuanian delegation will soon be going to Moscow and will be ready to meet with Kremlin representatives to begin the proposed "preliminary consultations." The delegation is to be led by Bronius Kuzmickas, deputy chairman of the Lithuanian Parliament.

In the one critical note raised in the letter, the Parliament says it "regrets the position and methods chosen by the U.S.S.R." during the current crisis.

Mr. Gorbachev issued his ultimatum to Lithuania after a month of steadily increasing threats and warnings that Lithuania must rescind its declaration and all subsequent legislation. Moscow has maintained that Lithuania and all other Soviet republics are free to secede from the Soviet Union provided they follow guidelines recently adopted by the national Parliament in Moscow, which include a referendum requiring a two-thirds vote to approve secession, a transition period running a minimum of five years and approval by the Congress of People's Deputies, the full Soviet Parliament.

Lithuanian officials insist that they are seeking not to secede, but rather to re-establish the independence that was lost in 1940, when Lithuania and the neighboring Baltic republics of Latvia and Estonia were forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union by Stalin.

As the Parliament worked today on a political solution to the stalemate with Moscow, Mrs. Prunskiene and the Lithuanian Foreign Minister, Algirdas Saudargas, left for a trip to Norway, trying to find practical help for the fledgling republic through foreign investors and economic aid.